

Scottish immigrant dotted Utah with mills built to last

During the early settlement of Salt Lake Valley, you didn't have to die to "cross over Jordan." But the valley west of the river was like alien country and those were hardy families who left the security of growing Salt Lake City to settle there.

Archibald Gardner looked to the west of the valley and envisioned the opportunity to do what he liked best – build mills. In his lifetime, he constructed 35 of them to serve pioneer purposes ranging from grinding grain to sawing lumber. For many years, he also was bishop of the West Jordan Ward, which extended from the Point of the Mountain on the south end of valley to the northern mountain point that eventually marked the dividing line between Salt Lake and Davis counties.

Gardner was born in Scotland in 1814 and immigrated with his parents to Canada when he was a child. They settled on the Canadian frontier and young Archibald got his first taste of mill-building at 17. Already he was handy with the ax, since he had contracted with ship builders to provide timbers.

The Canadian district in which the family lived needed a mill. Most families ground their wheat in coffee mills, an inefficient approach to the task. The teenager became his own engineer, carpenter and builder as he constructed an up-to-date facility in Warwick. With that experience under his belt, he undertook a second mill in Enniskillen, about 25 miles away. It had an attached sawmill. The two mills and their land were valued at \$12,000 and Archibald was on way to becoming a man of means.

When his family joined The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, however, they were forced to leave Canada and trust their fortunes to the migrations of the church. Many of the Saints were then in Winter Quarters, Neb., preparing for the move west. The Gardners were in one of the first companies, arriving in Utah Territory in the fall of 1847.

Archibald and his brother, Robert, lost no time in establishing a mill in the winter of 1847-48 at the Warm Springs north of the fledgling community. In the spring they obtained the first permit issued by the High Council to leave the Old Fort. They took their mill and moved to "The Grove," an area

that later adopted the name of Mill Creek. They had a mill operating in time for the fall 1848 grain harvest.

The Gardner brothers were among a half dozen men called by Brigham Young in 1851 to follow the Weber and Provo rivers to their sources. They were directed to determine how much grazing land the rivers watered, the amount of timber available and anything else that would facilitate settlement.

On the side, explorers reported dens of rattlesnakes that inconvenienced them, beavers making dams and even a bear that watched them through the pine trees.

As Salt Lake Valley filled with immigrants, colony leaders decided water was more important for agriculture than for mills. The Gardners relocated their Mill Creek operation upstream in the mountain so they would not compete with valley farmers for water.

By 1853, the family was ready to "cross over" Jordan. Gardner's fourth mill was built in West Jordan. A 2.5-mile mill race was dug and the Jordan River was dammed to provide sufficient power to turn the mill wheel. The \$5,000 project was completed and in operation in 1850.

The partnership between Archibald and Robert ended in 1857 when the latter was called to serve a mission in Canada. He was later sent in the other direction -- to St. George -- to settle. Brigham Young purchased his half of the Gardner mill.

Archibald's first mills were built in the old way, with mortises and pins instead of nails. The joints became so strong that dismantling them was a challenge. A grandson, James H. Gardner, helped tear down one of the mills years later. The workers found they couldn't get things to budge until the by-then elderly Archibald pointed out the key corner where the last brace of the building was located. Working from there, they pulled the structure down.

Gardner built mills in Spanish Fork, Fairfield, Taylorsville, Star Valley, Wyo., and in other areas over the years. His pride was in the building, not in the operating, of these mills, family members

recorded. He was happiest with an ax in hand and a new mill to build. He would sell an existing mill almost at a loss so he could get on with a new one.

Over the years, Gardner obtained and relinquished water rights as the need arose. His opportunities for personal wealth often were waived for the good of the communities he served.

The mill in Spanish Fork, for instance, was acquired by the Co-operative Mercantile Co., a growing business providing goods to several Utah County communities. Gardner had expected to spend the remainder of his life in Spanish Fork but returned to West Jordan when he was called as the bishop.

His position as religious leader of the growing west valley community also made him responsible for education and other secular needs. Under his direction, buildings were constructed to house community functions. A rock meetinghouse was begun in 1861 and was in use by 1863, although it was not dedicated until 1867.

Wherever Gardner's mills were located, other industries sprang up, including blacksmith shops, logging and lumber concerns, a broom factory and a woolen and carding operations, tanneries, and a shoe shop. Stores were established as more settlers "crossed over" and planted themselves on the west side of the valley.

Archibald Gardner contributed manpower as well as mill power to the growing communities. He had 11 wives and four dozen children and his numerous progeny is now scattered over the world.

Gardner's mill at 1095 W. 7800 South underwent several metamorphoses over the years after its usefulness for grinding grain came to an end. It was sometimes vacant, sometimes used for storage, until the late 1970s, when Nancy Christenson became the owner. She was intrigued with the old mill and thought it would make a good home. But since the building had been nominated for the National Historic Register, that was not feasible. It was remodeled as Country Furniture and Gifts. In 1990, it opened as Archibald's Restaurant. Gardner Village, a collection of shops and eateries with a vintage flair, has grown up at the site.

A village museum, a restored 1860 building, is a repository for some of Gardner's memorabilia including journal entries outlining mill transactions, deeds, family clothing, eating utensils, drills, and other equipment and a picture of the Gardner family home in Scotland.

A restaurant is probably not one of the uses Gardner would have envisioned for his old mill, but he might have been gratified to find it still in use for any purpose more than a hundred years after he built it.

This was an article published in the Deseret News Tuesday, July 16, 1996